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Testimony of Doreen Hagen
Tribal Council, Prairie Island Indian Community
Yucca Mountain Public Hearings; Pahrump, Nevada
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My name is Doreen Hagen. I represent the Prairie Island Indian Community as a member of our Tribal Council. Prairie Island is located on a small reservation in southeastern Minnesota along the shores of the Mississippi and Vermillion Rivers.

We are a small tribe of fewer than 550 members. And we are a young tribe – more than half of our members are under the age of 18.

Our reservation consists of fewer than 500 acres of land, and some of that land is in flood plains so it is not usable. We have lived off this land for many generations. It is sacred land to our people. It is my home as well as the final resting place for my ancestors.

My community understands and appreciates the concerns of those who are opposed to the storage of nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain. We respect their point of view.

I am here, however, to share a different point of view – one that is unique to my community and one that most certainly has bearing on these proceedings.

Perhaps nowhere in United States is the problem of nuclear waste more evident than on Prairie Island. No community in the nation lives closer to a

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nuclear power plant and nuclear waste storage site than the Prairie Island Indian Community.

Our homes, community center, church, government center and business are all located fewer than 600 yards from a nuclear power plant and nuclear waste storage site operated by Xcel Energy.

Currently, ten above ground, dry-cask storage units of highly radioactive nuclear waste sit just outside of our reservation boundaries. Seven more casks will be filled within the next few years. And we fear that the state of Minnesota will allow Xcel Energy to store another 31 casks outside of our reservation due to the absence of a national repository.

We have never benefited from being forced to live next to the storage site – we do not even receive the electricity generated by the nuclear power plant that produces the waste.

The nuclear waste was allowed on Prairie Island despite our strong objection and the federal government's trust responsibility to our community. Our health and safety concerns continue to be ignored.

Adding to our concern, there is only one permanent road leading off Prairie Island, away from the plant and storage units, and that road is blocked at times by train activity and is subject to flooding.

We also believe the recent acts of terrorism increase the need to remove the nuclear waste from Prairie Island. The storage casks themselves sit only

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yards away from the Mississippi River, on a flood plain. An accident or an act of terrorism would potentially devastate our community and communities all along the Mississippi River, from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.

And there has never been a health study looking at what, if any, impact living so close to a nuclear waste storage site has had on our community's health.

We live everyday fearing what we do not know.

The federal government has had more than 20 years to develop a solution for handling the nuclear waste storage problem. It has been more than two years since the federal government was obligated by law to begin removing nuclear waste from Prairie Island and the nation's other nuclear power plants.

Today, we fear the possibility that, without a permanent repository, what has always been called a temporary storage site will become a permanent storage site; or worse yet, a permanent regional storage site, where the federal government ships waste from other nuclear power plants to Prairie Island.

We cannot allow this to happen.

As Indian people, we have a history of valuing and protecting the earth, the waters and the air. With this in mind, we have considered Yucca Mountain very carefully. In fact, representatives from Prairie Island, including myself,

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have visited Yucca Mountain on several occasions to learn about the facility and witness the work that is being done there to determine if the site is capable of safely storing the nation's nuclear waste.

If science determines that Yucca Mountain is safe, then we will support it versus the alternative of leaving the nation's nuclear waste where it sits at sites scattered across the nation – perhaps none more threatening than the nuclear waste that sits just 600 yards from our community.

The Prairie Island facility is not designed for permanent storage and is simply too close to our community to be safe.

We did not ask for a nuclear neighbor. And we know the people of Nevada have not asked for one either. Nobody wants nuclear waste stored in their backyard.

But our tribal government owes it to our community, especially our children and future generations, to do what we can to see that our ancestral home does not become a permanent reminder of a nation's failed nuclear waste policy.

We believe that storing nuclear waste in a remote, militarily secure location, in a facility designed for permanent storage is a better solution than leaving it where it sits, virtually unguarded and only yards away from a vulnerable community with limited evacuation routes.

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The federal government first failed in its trust responsibility to our community more than 25 years ago when it allowed a nuclear power plant to be built next to our reservation. And it failed again in 1994 when it allowed nuclear waste to be stored 600 yards from our homes.

It is time for the federal government to do the right thing and help our community and remove the nuclear waste from Prairie Island.

Thank you.